

VZCZCXRO7208
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHNEH
DE RUEHCI #0337/01 3631444
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 291444Z DEC 09
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2523
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2425
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 1030
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 1027
RUEHNEH/AMCONSUL HYDERABAD 0093
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 3152

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000337

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB (TITUS)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: JHARKHAND: JMM'S SHIBU SOREN TO BE CHIEF MINISTER WITH BJP
SUPPORT

REF: A. KOLKATA 19
[1](#)B. KOLKATA 336

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) supremo and parliamentarian Shibui Soren will become Chief Minister of the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand on December 30, heading a five-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition. Even though a Congress alliance garnered the highest number of seats in a legislature with no single party majority (Ref A), the party preferred to stay out of power considering long term political interests. On the other hand, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supported the JMM in an attempt to arrest its own dwindling political fortunes. In eastern India, NDA now governs both Bihar and Jharkhand. Whether BJP will be able to sustain a stable regime that can facilitate development in backward but mineral-rich Jharkhand, remains to be seen. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) JMM supremo, Member of Parliament, and former Union Minister Shibui Soren will be sworn in as Jharkhand Chief Minister on December 30. Soren, who was Chief Minister twice in the past, heads a five-party NDA coalition that will form Jharkhand's seventh government since the state's inception in [1](#)2000. On December 26, with no single party winning a majority in state elections, coalition leaders met Jharkhand Governor K. Sankaranarayanan who invited them to form the government. The Governor requires the alliance to prove their majority on the floor of the assembly by January 8, 2010. The party breakdown of the ruling alliance of 44 legislators in the 81-member state legislative assembly is:

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)	18	
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)		18
Janata Dal United (JDU)	2	
All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU)		5
Jharkhand Janadhikar Manch (JJM)		1

[1](#)3. (SBU) Jharkhand Congress General Secretary Manishankar told Post that although the Congress-Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (JVM) alliance won 25 seats, the party high command decided against forming a government after considering both national and state-level factors. Congress's long term interests would suffer if it supported a "tainted" Soren, whom it considers a failure as Chief Minister in the past and whose party includes several legislators alleged to be former Maoists. The Congress was also reluctant to seek the support of Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), which could harm the Congress's prospects in the 2010 assembly elections in neighboring Bihar, where RJD is Congress's rival. Manishankar emphasized that the party high command is thinking long term and expects the Congress-JVM support base to expand further while JMM and BJP rule Jharkhand.

14. (SBU) JMM's Central Organization Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya told Post that given a fractured mandate and Soren's inability to ally with rival tribal party JVM, the only option for a stable government lay with the BJP. The latter, with a setback at the national level, has no alternative but to support JMM with Soren as Chief Minister while the smaller parties are likely to provide steadfast support to stay in government. Bhattacharya noted that of the 12 ministerial positions, the coalition has agreed upon four ministries each to JMM and BJP, three to AJSU, and one to JDU.

15. (SBU) Comment: In his previous Chief Ministerial incarnations, Soren has proved an inept administrator unable to contain either corruption or security problems. Physically weak and ailing, 65 year-old Soren runs a one-man-show in JMM and is desperate to bolster his image since his humiliating by-election defeat and resignation from the Chief Minister position in January 2009 when he was a UPA ally (Ref B). Since Soren is not a member of the Jharkhand state assembly, he will need to be elected to the state assembly within six months of his appointment as Chief Minister. His son will most likely resign from his assembly constituency to provide a free seat for a bi-election. BJP will support him to protect its own political fortunes for the time being, while the Congress follows a strategy of remaining in opposition to build a wider political base. In eastern India, NDA now governs both Bihar and Jharkhand, but whether BJP will be able to sustain a stable regime that can facilitate development in mineral-rich Jharkhand, remains to be seen.

16. (SBU) BJP's decision to back a tainted Soren, who acquitted by Jharkhand's High Court on murder charges in under appeal, is seen as a desperate attempt by the party to make its way back into relevance. After losing the May 2009 national elections,

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the party has been in disarray and ended up losing state assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana as well. With new leadership in place, the BJP is hoping to come back into contention and has decided to back Soren despite reservations within a section of the party against backing a corrupt and tainted Chief Minister. End Comment.
PAYNE